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THE FAR EASTERN SITUATION.

THE recent diplomatic controversy concerning the actions of Russia in Manchuria and at the Court of Peking is now a closed incident, but the situation which gave rise to it is still one of the most vital questions in the world of politics. Day by day it is becoming increasingly evident that what the balance of power in Europe has been to the politics of the nineteenth century that of the balance of power in the Orient will be to the twentieth century. In the former question the United States had simply an academic interest; in the latter it has both a political and commercial interest, due to our possession of the Philippines and our rapidly expanding Oriental trade. While, therefore, the balance of power in Europe affected Europe only, that of the balance of power in the Orient involves the interests of all the leading powers of Europe, Asia, and America.

Up to a decade ago the question attracted very little attention, for until then the influence of England was unquestionably the supreme influence in the Orient, and under such conditions the question appeared to be a very simple one. But the Chino-Japanese war changed the face of affairs. By combining with Germany and France, Russia succeeded in depriving Japan of the greater part of the fruits of her victory. The pretext under which this action was consummated, solemnized, and made respectable was the preservation of the integrity of the Chinese Empire.

Yet the zeal for maintaining the integrity of the Chinese Empire, which was consuming in its intensity, very soon manifested itself in rather a remarkable way, for hardly had Japan been ousted from the Lao-Ting Peninsula when Russia made the discovery that the said peninsula would be useful to her, as it would furnish her a nice free port, a naval base, a terminus for her Trans-Siberian Railway, and an excuse to have troops within easy striking distance of Peking,

and, simultaneously with this revelation, Germany became convinced that, under all the circumstances in the case, the harbor of Kiao-Chow, together with a considerable portion of the province of Shantung, was a fair equivalent to her for two German missionaries. France received, as her share in the reward for guarding the territorial integrity of China, the occupation of Suangchow Bay, in the province of Suangting, her lease being similar to the one under which Russia was given possession of Port Arthur and its adjacent territory. Thus none of them returned from their labor of love empty-handed.

During this period of zealous activity of the allies on behalf of China, the diplomacy of England in the Orient was lamentably weak and invertebrate. English diplomats did not seem to awaken to a realization of what had been going on at the Tsung li Yamen until 1898. Then they awoke to find that Russian and not English influence was dominant in China. Nor can this change be attributed to the Boer war; since it had been wrought as early as 1896, and was due very largely to the weak and vacillating policy of England at the close of the China-Japanese War. Had she played a strong hand at that time, she could have saved herself much loss of prestige, both political and commercial, and at the same time promoted the peace of the world.

The acquisition of Wei-Hai-Wei was an attempt upon the part of England to offset the advantage gained by Russia in the possession of Port Arthur, but a more extended study at close range has shown that as a naval base it is almost worthless as compared with Port Arthur. The fact is that Port Arthur is, as the Japanese and Russians fully realize, by far the most commanding port in China. That the English are now convinced of the inferiority of Wei-Hai-Wei may be safely concluded from the fact that they have given up the project of fortifying it.

Having failed single-handed to regain her lost prestige in the Orient, England resorted to an alliance with Japan to accomplish the desired end. It is perhaps too soon to say whether or not this will be successful, as that is a question

which the future alone can answer. But we may say that, as a general proposition, an alliance is a confession of weakness rather than an evidence of strength, and, as a rule, confessions of weakness are not well calculated to increase prestige.

After having secured a lease of Port Arthur, Russia lost no time in pushing a branch of her Trans-Siberian Railway through Manchuria to that port; so that when the Boxer outbreak occurred in 1900 she had an excellent excuse for placing her troops in Manchuria in order to protect her railway in that province. It would seem to the outsider that out of her abundant caution she has been rendering ample protection to this railway, for even two years after the Boxer outbreaks in that region were at an end she had in Manchuria eighty thousand troops—a larger body than the standing army of the United States, and as large a number as England has in India for the purpose of enforcing order among three hundred million people of an alien race. A solemn promise had been given by Russia to withdraw these troops by a fixed date, unless disorders in the Chinese Empire rendered it inadvisable to do so. Her recent attempts to evade the fulfillment of this promise, coupled with certain demands upon China, resulted in the recent strained relations.

Bearing these facts in mind, let us view the situation as it presents itself to-day. Russia is, in accordance with her usual custom, playing a waiting game. She will avoid, if possible, being forced to show her hand until Manchuria has become Russianized by the influx of Russian capital and colonists. We may get some idea of the rate at which the former is going on from the fact that the Russian government is spending eighty million dollars a year upon improvements in Dalny alone; and, while there are no available statistics, it is well known that in many of the towns along the railway the Russians are already in the majority. It needs no argument to prove that this rapid growth of Russian interests in Manchuria will strengthen the hands of the Russian diplomats.

It is true that Russia has made a solemn disclaimer of any intention to retain possession of Manchuria permanently.

But he who would ascertain what Russia intends to do should seek evidence in the acts of her officials as well as in the words of her diplomats, and when these two cannot be made to harmonize, it is at least equally safe to rely upon the former. Such being the case, we have but to study the amount and the character of the expenditures of the Russian government at Port Arthur and at Dalny in order to conclude that Russia does not intend to abandon Manchuria unless forced to do so.

This brings us face to face with the question: Are the interests of the other Powers such as to warrant an appeal to force in order to convince Russia that the principle of the integrity of the Chinese Empire should be observed by her as well as by Japan? In endeavoring to answer this question, the character as well as the extent of the interests must be considered.

China undoubtedly has a sufficient interest, as the acquisition of Manchuria by Russia would be the signal for a further dismemberment of her empire. But, unfortunately, China has neither the national spirit nor the organization to enable her to use force effectively against Russia. Hence, if the territorial integrity of China is to be preserved, it must be with the assistance of the other Powers.

Next to China, Japan has by far the most vital interest. This is of a political and military as well as of a commercial nature. With Russia in complete possession of Manchuria, Korea is doomed. To prevent this is a life-and-death matter with Japan. Japan can never afford to let Russia get possession of Korea, and will never permit it until she has exhausted the strength of her naval and military arms. Hence, Japan had far better accept the issue with reference to Manchuria than to wait until Russia is firmly established upon Korea's western frontier. When it is evident that force must be resorted to, it is akin to folly to let the enemy choose his own time and field of battle. At present Japan has many advantages arising from her geographical position. She can get "on the ground" first, strike the first blow, and by using Korea as a base cut the Russian line of communication be-

tween Vladivostock and Port Arthur—an advantage which to Japan is worth several army corps. It is for this reason that Russia has for years been planning to get control of Corea. Once in possession of Corea, Russia could not only protect her communications between Vladivostock and Port Arthur by sea and land, but would be a constant menace to the safety of Japan. The Muscovite could then dictate terms at Tokio as now at Peking.

Japan is not at present unprepared for war, either from the standpoint of national spirit and determination or material equipment and military organization. Such is the discipline and efficiency of her army and the strength of her navy that she would give a very good account of herself in a war with Russia. That it would be exceedingly expensive for Russia to wage war so far from her base of supplies and with troops individually superior to her own must be evident to Russia as well as to every one else. In the naval contest, Japan would have a decided advantage, as her navy is superior to the Russian squadron in Asiatic waters. Under all the circumstances it is safe to predict that the outcome would at least not be evident from the start, as is asserted by many who reckon strength by numbers only.

The interests of England and of the United States, unlike those of China and Japan, are principally commercial. Yet even commercial interests are not to be lightly disregarded in an age of strenuous competition for the markets of the world. Such has been the rapid growth in our exports that in certain lines we control the Manchurian trade. If we can maintain access to the Manchurian markets upon equal terms with Russia, our cotton trade alone will very soon amount to ten million dollars annually. Hence it is not surprising that the United States should have been the first to protest against the Russian demand upon China that no more foreign consulates or open ports be established in Manchuria.

Not only is the maintenance of open markets in Manchuria a matter of importance to our Southern cotton mills, but the value of Manila as an entrepôt of trade depends measurably upon the maintenance of the open door throughout China.

Whatever threatens the policy of the open door in China affects us to such an extent that it is our duty to speak, and our position in the Orient entitles us to be heard. Were it certain that Russia would adhere to the policy of the open door in Manchuria after absorbing that province, a change of political sovereignty from China to Russia would not affect our commercial interests injuriously.

True, Russia has assured the United States that she will adhere to the said policy. But, as is usual in Russian diplomacy, her promises contain a saving clause which, in the present case, is the following, "as that principle (the open door) is understood by the imperial government." When translated, this means that Russia intends to be the sole interpreter of our treaties with China, and to grant us such commercial privileges in Manchuria as she feels compelled to. It has not been the custom of the United States to have her treaties authoritatively interpreted by outsiders, and I doubt if, as a self-respecting nation, we can afford to yield to any such pretensions upon the part of Russia. To compel respect for our treaties, it has never been necessary to use actual force, and in all probability never will be so long as it is well understood that force will be appealed to as a last resort.

To England the question presented is partly commercial and partly strategic, for the supremacy of English influence in the Yangtse Valley can be much more easily maintained when Russian rule stops at the northern boundary of Manchuria than when it extends to within easy striking distance of Peking. Such being the case, England cannot well afford to stand idly by and see Manchuria become a Russian province. It would seem that her most advisable way to prevent this would be to strengthen the hands of Japan and China; and it is equally clear that this assistance should not be confined to the writing of dispatches or a liberal supply of "moral support," but should take the more substantial form of loans. Also the presence of a rather strong British squadron in Asiatic waters would exert a salutary influence.

Germany claims to have no interest in the matter, and would no doubt keep "hands off," as she would have more to

gain by so doing. Asia Minor is at present a more productive field of operation for Germany than is China. Furthermore, the position of a neutral usually has its decided advantages. Were France to follow the line of greatest advantage, which in this case coincides with the line of least resistance, she also would remain neutral; but the power of habit is strong, and France has become so used to having her foreign policy dictated from St. Petersburg that it is difficult to say just what attitude France would assume.

A more exhaustive discussion would undoubtedly be valuable, but perchance enough has been said to make clear that the question is of vital importance and hence worthy of the most careful study; that it is far from being settled; and that its settlement may yet convulse three continents. Our own policy is one of far-reaching importance; and as in a republic national policies, whether foreign or domestic, are determined largely by public opinion, it is of supreme moment that public opinion be enlightened upon this question.

EDWIN MAXEY.